

## Losing continually haunts NU

Sports are Play-Doh. Their importance molds from situation to situation.

In one breath, sports are life. In another, on the low end of the winning spectrum, they've been put into perspective by life. Nebraska women's basketball Coach Paul Sanderford took the latter approach in his discussion of a 10-14 (now 10-15) record at Monday's press conference.

Now that consistent winning is no longer an option for NU, Sanderford has resorted to looking in the mirror each morning and liking himself, or so he said. He has instructed his team to do likewise, consigning them to a group of recovering alcoholics, carnival workers and "Snow White" villains.

Funny what losing does and the mystery that it brings along with it. Nebraska, a team that, according to one of its players, has as much talent as any team in the Big 12, is merely trying to get through the season.

Not any real reasons for it. There are, but there aren't. And depending on who you ask, the reasons that are for one aren't for another, or they aren't for anyone publicly, whereas, in actuality, they really are. Just nobody will say it. Got that?

Losing teams never do. They look in the mirror or watch inspirational movies, as Sanderford has said they did before losing to Oklahoma like "Hoosiers," an Indiana basketball film in which Dennis Hopper plays a recovering alcoholic. See the connection?

Losing teams don't. It never gets set right. There's no reason to have expected a season like this. Nebraska does have talent. And quicks. And hops. And 'bows. It may lack smarts, but that hasn't stopped many a dumb collegiate men's basketball team - Cincinnati and Maryland come to mind - from enjoying parcels of success. What gives?

Like losing teams know. It's the schedule, or inexperience, or luck or misfortune. It's a better Big 12 Conference than last year. It's a head-scratching Nebraska offense that tries too hard to pound the ball inside. It's an endless bench of talent and a 12-woman rotation.

It's one of those seven deadly sins - forced gluttony. Sanderford had a boatload of skill and not a lot of role players. How do you fit talent into roles? Not so easily sometimes. And how do you manage a team that rarely has four players click on the same night?

It just goes on and on, a litany of clauses glomming together like an insurance agreement. Just sign at the bottom and admit defeat.

A lot like life. I mean perspective. I mean mirrors. I mean Dennis Hopper, post-"Apocalypse Now." That includes "Hoosiers" you know. Freaky things, man, freaky things!

It hasn't been fun. I'll tell you. Watching four games in person and seven or eight on the tube, there's a point where one loss morphs into another. Different game, different reasons, still losing, same thing. It's taken a wear on Sanderford, and you gotta cop a feel for the man - his past is better than his present.

And he had to use it Monday - "I've won 400 games folks" - to remind us he still gets Xs and Os. We trust, Paul. We ain't mad atcha.

The game has not passed the man by, and the best games are still in front of many of his players. This isn't forever. A season like this you play, you lose, you momentarily weep, you move on.

Losing is a haunting thing; you can't put your finger on it all the time. Try and ask Nebraska's players about it. See above for attributed confusion, and if they don't know, then who?

Mirror, mirror on the wall ...

## NU swimmers begin Big 12 journey

It's a race for second place in the Big 12 championships as host Texas is expected to run away with swimming title.

BY TOBY BURGER

Usually you settle for second place, but the Nebraska women's swimming and diving teams would welcome such a finish.

Big 12 championships start today and run through Saturday in Austin, Texas, but expectations of knocking off perennial power Texas, especially at home, is slim.

Interim Coach Paul Nelsen is realistic about how any of the other five teams competing will fare against the No. 9 Longhorns.

"I expect it (the finals) to be top-heavy with Texas," Nelsen said, "and the teams that are going to get second and third are going to be the teams that get in the finals with them."

For Nebraska to garner a second-place finish, Nelsen said most if not all individuals

need to record season-best times and even personal-best times. Those time expectations aren't expected only from seasoned All-American leaders Beth Karaica, Elvira Fischer and Lindsey Highstrom, but productivity is expected from many of the budding and talented freshmen.

Interim Assistant Coach Doug Humphrey is confident with the Huskers' young talent and their ability to step up for the Big 12 championships if the team aims to take home second.

"We have quite a few swimmers who are ready to break out that are really kind of unknown," Humphrey said. "Barbara Auer, Rebecca Wolfe, Kristin Souppa - some of those freshmen who we haven't seen what they can really do."

With the help of young talent, proven leaders will still need to hold steadfast to anchor the team.

In the Big 12, Karaica has the third fastest time in the 50-yard freestyle and fourth in the 100-yard freestyle. She is being counted on to

make the finals especially with the team slim in the freestyle sprints.

Jackie Lobdell heads up the distance events. Her times for the 500-, 1,000- and 1,650-yard freestyle races rank her in the top-three times in each event in the Big 12.

Both the 100- and 200-yard backstroke times are lead by Highstrom, but Auer may also make a strong showing for the Huskers.

The one-two punch of Fischer and Kari Hehn in the 100- and 200-yard breaststroke matches could prove to be too much, maybe even for Texas.

Recent addition Carmen Cosgrove will try to continue her early success in the 100- and 200-yard butterfly races. In addition to being relied upon in the butterfly, Cosgrove is part of five different relays.

In a move made by the Big 12 Conference, both the men's and women's diving championships are being held this weekend. The

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Swimmers, on your marks

### Women's Big XII Swimming Championships

Where: Austin, Texas  
University of Texas

When: Today through Saturday

The Skinny: Everybody is chasing Texas, but look for NU All-Americans Beth Karaica, Elvira Fischer and Lindsey Highstrom to create some waves in the Longhorns' pool. Look for some younger Huskers to perform well, too.



Freshman gymnasts Tami Harris, (left), Libby Landgraf, (center), and Gina Bruce have stepped up their performance as freshmen to help carry the 6th ranked Husker Women's Gymnastics team this season. Harris, Landgraf and Bruce all compete in the 10.0 vault, the most difficult vault, in which the highest score possible is a 10.0.

## Three freshmen provide NU boost

BY JASON MERRIHEW

A winning season can be built on the success of a few athletes. However, turning a winning season into a championship requires a total team effort.

In order for Nebraska's gymnasts to reach that goal, the Cornhuskers looked for others to stand out and pick up the slack left by departed athletes. In the process, three freshmen have picked up that slack nicely.

Heading into the season, the sixth-ranked Nebraska women's gymnastic team found itself without graduated NCAA all-around champion Heather Brink. The Huskers also had to deal with injuries to sophomores A.J. Lamb (back) and Bree Dority O'Callaghan (knee).

The talented trio of Gina Bruce, Tami Harris and Libby Landgraf joins the already established Alecia Ingram, a two-time Big 12 gymnast of the week, to form this year's freshman class and help put NU back in the midst of a title chase.

While Ingram has consistently been in the spotlight filling the void left by Brink, the contribution of Ingram's three fellow classmates helped propel NU to its highest team score in school history, 197.050, last week in the West Virginia Quadrangular.

With the injuries to Lamb and O'Callaghan, Coach Dan Kendig has used the young gymnasts to fill the void.

"Our freshman class has done a terrific job for us all season," Kendig said. "We rely on them a lot, and they have competed well for us from the very

first meet." Harris has been a positive constant for NU this season. The Virginia Beach, Va., native is second on the team in the number of all-around competitions.

In four all-arounds, Harris is averaging 38.762 for the season, including a career-high 39.3 in last week's fifth-place showing at the quadrangular.

Harris, who recently increased her start value in the vault to a 10.0, recorded a career-high 9.90 score in the event last week.

She also set a career-high 9.95 on the uneven bars at the quadrangular, tying her with teammate O'Callaghan for first place in the event.

Kendig said he feels that Harris has the potential to do bigger and better things for the Cornhuskers.

"Tami is one talented gymnast," Kendig said. "What she is capable of in the long run, she is going to be the one to turn some heads."

Bruce has also turned some heads with her power and her ability to step in at any event.

Nebraska broke the 197 point barrier for the first time in school history against Missouri earlier

"Our freshman class has done a terrific job for us all season."

Dan Kendig  
gymnastics coach

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## Wildcats not a test this time

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

The Nebraska basketball team seemed to forget that it was Valentine's Day, showing anything but love for its Big 12 conference brethren Kansas State on Wednesday night.

Instead, the Cornhuskers (12-12, 5-6) used an impressive dynamic duo attack by senior center Kimani Ffriend and freshman forward Brian Conklin to whip the Wildcats (8-14, 2-9) 82-56 before 7,022 fans at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Ffriend, admittedly playing up and down recently, reasserted himself in a big way, claiming 17 points and 11 rebounds in only 24 minutes of play. Conklin popped in 11 points and grabbed a career-high 17 boards.

Conklin continued his recent tear, following up his career high 18-point performance against Baylor on Saturday with his first career double-double on Wednesday.

"He's opening up the inside for both Steffon (Bradford) and I," Ffriend said. "In today's game, they couldn't help out as much on me when they set the double team because they didn't want to leave (Conklin) out there to shoot a three-pointer."

Conklin drew the start for Nebraska in place of Nebraska senior forward Steffon Bradford, who was benched after a pre-game dunk gave NU a technical foul before the game even started.

"If you're coming off the bench or starting, you're still going to be playing in the game," Conklin said. "Coach wants you out there for a reason. You just got

Please see WILDCATS on 9

## ISU coach still plugging away

BY DAVID DIEHL

Iowa State wrestling coach Bobby Douglas has been around the wrestling world for what seems to be an eternity.

In his 27th remarkable year as a college wrestling coach, Douglas is leading his fourth-ranked Cyclones to another charge at a stellar NCAA finish. His ISU squad will square off against Nebraska on Friday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center - just another match in Douglas's near three decades in the sport.

However, despite the emerging gray hairs and the trophy cases of accomplishments, the gritty 59-year-old coach from Ohio is still going strong and isn't planning on even tapping the brakes anytime soon.

"I'm on an eight to 10 year plan," said Douglas, who is using that period as a timeline to usher out his current crop of wrestlers and push through another handful of recruiting classes.

"It's been real tough; it's been a challenge," Douglas said of his longevity. "I've had outstanding student athletes, worked with a lot of administrative support and had a lot of fan support."

In that time, the wrestlers that Douglas has already had a hand in overseeing have been some of the

most productive ever, individually and as teams.

A member of several halls of fame already, including the National Wrestling Hall of Fame (inducted 1987), Douglas started his coaching career at Arizona State in 1974 after he won a Big Eight championship wrestling for Oklahoma State and helped them win the 1964 NCAA title.

Leading the Sun Devils to a 225-77-6 record over his 18 years in Tempe, Ariz., Douglas' 1988 ASU squad is the only team outside the Big Ten or Big 12 to win a national title since 1950.

Assisting on Olympic teams in 1976, 1980, 1984 and 1988, Douglas was coach for the 1992 United States freestyle team and led it to heights never achieved. All 10 competitors wrestled to top 10 finishes, and three gold medals were handed out to Americans that year.

Other coaches around the Big 12 Conference have marveled at Douglas's accomplishments, such as his 357 career wins and his staying power.

Oklahoma State Coach John Smith and Nebraska Coach Mark Manning, both relatively young coaches, said they shudder somewhat at the idea of being a coach

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## The best athlete you don't know

It's sad, kind of disappointing even. One of the greatest athletes of our time, if not all time, is going to be at the Devaney Center, and you won't go see him. What's more, you probably don't even know he exists.

Ninth-ranked Nebraska's wrestling team takes on No. 4 Iowa State in wrestling on Friday in the Devaney's track pavilion. Cael Sanderson will be there, and you should be, too.

In fact, if you're not there, you'd better be dead or in jail. And if you're in jail, break out.

Sanderson, Iowa State's top-ranked 184-pounder, is probably the most dominant wrestler in collegiate history, and it is unfortunate that nobody outside the world of wrestling knows about him.

Gretzky, Jordan, Ali, Sanderson. I'm not kidding. He's that good. If wrestlers wore numbers on singlets, they wouldn't just retire his, they'd take it out of the whole numerical system.

Sanderson, a junior, has never lost in his three years of college competition. He blew past Iowa

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David Diehl